

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) evaluates a reasonable range of project alternatives, assesses the individual and cumulative impacts resulting from the proposed project, identifies measures to minimize or avoid significant impacts, and presents the associated mitigation measures. A Corridor Management Plan (CMP) for State Route 163 (SR 163) was prepared by the California Department of Transportation – District 11 (Department). The CMP developed a coordinated and programmatic approach to address needed safety improvements, corridor preservation and enhancement efforts on SR 163. The CMP is being used as a guide for the preparation of this DEIR.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed project is to reduce the severity of median accidents on SR-163 between KP 1.4-6.0 (PM 0.9-3.7), enhance the scenic quality of the corridor, and to preserve and restore historic elements of the corridor. The fatal accident rate from KP 1.9-3.8 (PM 1.2-2.4) is 0.022 fatal accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year, which is higher than the statewide average of 0.016 fatal accidents/per million vehicle miles/per year and exceeds the Department's accident criteria warrants. The corridor is experiencing a deterioration of landscaping, irrigation systems, fencing, and retaining walls. The corridor also has a number of non-standard features, including slope paving.

This corridor is completely absent of dedicated maintenance access points and because of high traffic volumes, requires the complete closure of either southbound or northbound lanes for any substantial maintenance activities. Maintenance personnel must be provided with a safe environment for their associated activities while preserving the free-flow of vehicular traffic. The elements of this proposed project are designed to address each of the stated deficiencies and needed improvements.

Proposed Project Elements:

- Construct Median Barrier.
- Rehabilitation and Restoration of the Landscaping.
- Replace and Upgrade Traffic Monitoring Stations (5 locations)
- Replace Irrigation System.
- Replace and Upgrade Upas Street Bridge Sign.
- Rehabilitate Robinson Avenue Retaining Wall.
- Introduce Slope Paving (Seven Locations).
- Construct Maintenance Vehicle Pullouts (Six Locations).
- Remove Paving and Landscape Abandoned Ramp (I-5/SR-163 interchange).
- Rehabilitate Existing Maintenance Access Road.
- Plant trees within the Balboa Park viewshed.

The CMP studied two additional elements that would not be implemented as part of this proposed project:

- Modification to Lighting Standards
- Bridge Rail Replacement
- Pavement Removal and Landscaping of the Abandoned Quince and Richmond Street Ramps.

Timing of Project Elements

Construction of the median barrier and restoration of the median landscaping would be the first order of work (2004) following the anticipated approval of this DEIR. The remaining elements would be implemented over an approximate ten-year period, depending upon available funds. The year of anticipated action for the remaining elements is indicated in the Impact Matrix. ([Table ES-1](#))

Median Barrier Alternatives

A number of alternative barrier types and barrier locations have been analyzed in conjunction with preparation of the CMP. The barrier types considered include:

- Concrete Barrier (various types, heights and locations)
- Thrie Beam (Metal Face Rail)
- Steel Backed Timber Guardrail (Timber Posts and Rails)

All of the barrier types studied, except Steel Backed Timber Guardrail, were withdrawn from consideration in response to public opposition and the lack of integration with the visual and historic resources of the corridor.

The Steel Backed Timber Guardrail (SBTG) is proposed within the median at two alternative horizontal placement locations, either 0.6 meter (2 feet) or 1.2 meters (4 feet) from the edge of the traveled way (existing concrete pavement).

Project Elements Alternatives

The only alternative to the remaining elements of the proposed project is the No Project Alternative. As indicated above each of these elements is proposed to address a needed safety improvement, restore a deteriorated feature, or preserve and enhance the visual and historic resources of the corridor.

Summary of Impacts

The proposed barrier introduces a new visual feature into the median that has historically been clear of any man-made structure. There are no impacts from the proposed project that would remain significant after mitigation. The proposed median barrier would have visual and historic impacts that would be mitigated to a level below significance. This new feature would have an

impact on the cross-median views and would change the historic context of this segment of SR 163.

The median barrier would not detract from the historic significance of the corridor, and would not jeopardize the corridor's listing on the local, state, and federal registers. The proposed mitigation measures include:

- The type of barrier selected, SBTG;
- The restoration of median landscaping and recordation of the SR 163 historic corridor in accordance with standards established by the U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service; and,
- Offsite planting at two proposed locations the Marston Addition and the Archery Range. (See Figure 17)

The SBTG is proposed as a measure that balances visual integration while also addressing an important safety element of the corridor. The re-introduction of landscaping into the median provides for visual mitigation as well as helping to restore historic features of the corridor.

Three elements of the proposed project, slope paving, maintenance vehicle pullouts (MVPs), and abandoned ramp removal at the I-5/SR-163 interchange, present impacts that are only considered significant prior to mitigation in a cumulative context. The slope paving would add new paving under existing structures. Mitigation for these new or modified features would include concrete that has been colored and given an aged appearance to match the existing conditions. The proposed MVPs would be strategically placed to minimize their appearance in the corridor. The pavement removal and introduction of new landscaping at the abandoned ramp location would enhance the visual quality of the corridor.

Additional elements discussed above and proposed for future implementation, which do not have the potential for significant impacts individually or cumulatively to the visual and historic resources of the corridor include:

- Replacement of the Irrigation System
- Replacement of Fencing
- Replacement/Introduction of Traffic Monitoring Stations
- Retaining Wall Rehabilitation at Robinson Avenue
- Maintenance Access Road

Areas of Controversy

The proposed placement of anything new, such as a median barrier, within this portion of SR 163 has been met with public concern and opposition. The Department has conducted extensive outreach efforts in an attempt to resolve these concerns and the opposition raised. The CMP was prepared in direct response to some of the concerns voiced by the public and stakeholders. The proposed barrier type selected, Steel Backed Timber Guardrail, stems from these outreach efforts. The communication and coordination with the public is ongoing and would continue throughout the project development and implementation processes.

Additional Department Projects

In 2001, the Department approved a pavement rehabilitation project on SR 163. This project was reviewed and approved independently of the proposed project presented in this DEIR. The pavement rehabilitation project includes:

- Rehabilitating the main lanes and shoulders.
- Installing rumble strips along the inside shoulders.
- Widening shoulders at gore points and near bridge columns.
- Curb relocation at bridge columns.
- Minor drainage inlet modifications.
- Upgrade existing metal beam guardrail installations and end treatments.
- Reconstruction of up to 0.6 m (2 ft) of paved shoulder with relocation/upgrade of median irrigation system.
- Upgrade existing signs with retro-reflective material.
- Rehabilitate pavement of selected ramps.
- Gore Paving/Rehabilitation

This project is scheduled to begin construction in 2004.

The Department has also approved and completed a traffic signage upgrade project in 2003.

Actions by Others

The San Diego Zoo has proposed a project, the Park Boulevard Promenade, which includes the construction of a new employee parking lot to accommodate 450 parking spaces. Access to the parking lot would be from Richmond Street using an existing zoo service driveway (City of San Diego Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Park Boulevard Promenade, page 3-26).

The San Diego Padres are nearing completion of a new ballpark in the Center City East area of downtown. Patron access to and from this new sports facility will introduce additional traffic to SR 163. Although the ballpark would present no direct visual impacts to the SR 163 corridor, the anticipated increase in traffic further supports the need for addressing the existing non-standard features within the corridor.

Permits, Reviews, & Approvals Required

The proposed mitigation areas, the Marston Addition and the Archery Range, as well as, the maintenance access road proposed for rehabilitation are under City of San Diego ownership. The Department is currently developing a Cooperative Agreement with the City of San Diego for access to the proposed mitigation sites and to rehabilitate the maintenance access road. Access to the highway facility begins at the Department right-of-way at an existing gate from that point the access road is within the identified mitigation area. Approval of this Cooperative Agreement, between the Department and the City of San Diego, would be critical to implementing some of the proposed mitigation measures and providing maintenance personnel with a dedicated access

point. The Cooperative Agreement would define the need for three years of maintenance by the Department, and afterwards, the City of San Diego would resume control of the management of the landscaping. A Maintenance Agreement and a Right-of-Way Agreement with the City of San Diego would be necessary for permanent access.

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this DEIR has been submitted to the State Clearinghouse on November 25, 2003. The next CTC action would involve a vote approving the currently proposed project, approving the funding source, and certifying the Final Environmental Impact Report, anticipated for April 2004.

Concurrence from the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) on the Historic Resources Compliance Report (HRCR) has been requested. The SHPO concurrence will be included in the Final EIR.

Actions by the California Transportation Commission will include filing a Notice of Determination for the EIR and approving project funding.

Table ES-1: Summary of Potential Impacts

PROJECT ACTION	IMPACTS	COMPENSATION/MITIGATION	SIGNIFICANCE	APPROXIMATE YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION
Construct Median Barrier	A new element within the Scenic Corridor and the Historic District.	Use of SBTG. New tree planting in the median. Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) documentation.	Mitigated below significance.	2004
Install/Upgrade Irrigation System	Temporary visual impacts during construction and plant re-establishment.	New planting and ground cover at construction locations. Replacement in kind of a non-contributing element to the Historic District.	No significant impacts.	2004
Replace Fencing	Temporary visual impacts during construction.	Replacement in kind.	No significant impacts.	2005
Construct Maintenance Vehicle Pullouts (MVPs) (6 locations)	A new element within the Scenic Corridor and the Historic District.	Locate to minimize visual impacts, pave with asphalt, keep number of locations at six or fewer..	Mitigated below significance.	2006
Refurbish Retaining Wall	Restoring an existing deteriorated wall.	Replacement in kind.	No significant impacts.	2007
Slope Paving (7 locations)	A change in the character of the resource.	New visual element, paving under bridges which would be treated to match the aged appearance of existing concrete from original construction. Replacement in kind.	Mitigated below significance.	2008
Signs	Installing Vertical Clearance Sign on Upas Street Bridge.	Photo documentation/recording prior to sign installation.	Mitigated below significance.	2004
Remove Pavement at Abandoned Ramp (I-5/SR-163 Interchange)	Temporary visual impacts during construction.	Tree planting at pavement removal location.	Mitigated below significance.	2009
Install Traffic Monitoring Stations	No impacts.	None.	No significant impacts.	2011
Upgrade Maintenance Access Road	A change in the character of the resource.	Restore landscaping to minimize the visual impacts and shield from the traveling public.	Mitigated below significance.	2006